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IN THE APPLICATION

OF

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FOR AN

ELECTROLUMINESCENT CABLE CONNECTOR

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ELECTROLUMINESCENT CABLE CONNECTOR

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to electrical cable connectors, and more particularly to a connector for electroluminescent cable having coaxial conductors.

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE RELATED ART

Electroluminescent cable (EL-cable) is a cool to the touch, bendable, vinyl coated wire that emits a pleasant 360-degree softly glowing neon light. EL-cable is a flexible wire cable having a solid copper center conductor surrounded by a material which is luminescent in an electric field. Two thin filaments or wires which are shorted together and helically wound around the luminescent material. The assembly is covered with one or two layers of vinyl or other plastic insulating material.

When an alternating current is conducted through the center conductor and the two filaments, the alternating electromagnetic field between the conductors causes the luminescent material to glow. Although the EL cable may be powered directly from the A.C. power mains, frequently the cable is powered by a D.C.

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inverter connected to a battery. The color emitted by the cable may vary with the frequency of the A.C. voltage or current. Usually the voltage must exceed a minimum threshold voltage before the EL-cable will glow.

EL technology is relatively new and only within the past few years has EL-cable become available in consumer products, specifically applications requiring lengths of glowing lights, applications which previously employed LED or other lamp technologies. An efficient and effective method for connecting EL-cable either to other strands of EL-cable or to a pair of copper wires has not been adequately addressed.

In general, connectors for electric cables are not new and the technology is well represented by devices for splicing wires together and for connecting wires to electronic devices. U.S. Patent No. 4,921,451, issued to R. Carlson in May of 1990, discloses in-line fuse holders for two-bladed fuses which can be fastened in series to an electrical wire by severing the wire in which the holder is to be incorporated, inserting the severed ends of the wire into the holder, and mechanically fastening the wire securely in the holder.

U.S. Patent No. 5,007,855, issued to O'Brien et al. in 1991, discloses a cable connector having a pair of electrically conductive jumper elements with a pair of spaced sharp

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protrusions that are electrically connected. U.S. Patent No. 5,055,071, issued to Carlson, deceased et al. in October of 1991, describes a cable connector in which two cables' conductors are each engaged by a slotted conductor, both of which engage with a common conducting bridge.

U.S. Patent No. 5,702,262, issued to Brown et al. in December of 1997, discloses a housing having connectors in coaxial alignment with a pair of barrels. In U.S. Patent Application Publication No. 2002/0182934, published in December 2002, Endo et al. describes a coaxial connector having a central contact, an insulating housing, a grounding shell and a clamp. A crimp barrel serves as a conductor-connecting portion that is crimped into contact with the central conductor of the coaxial cable once the central conductor is inserted into the central contact.

None of the above inventions and patents, taken either singly or in combination, is seen to describe a connector for EL-cable as claimed. Thus a simplified electroluminescent cable connector solving the aforementioned problems is desired.

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SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The electroluminescent cable connector is a connector for mechanically and electrically interconnecting a pair of electroluminescent (EL) cables, the EL-cable having a center copper conductor coated with an electroluminescent phosphor and two fine wires spiraling the length of the electroluminescent phosphor coating. The connector comprises an insulated base into which the cables are inserted at opposite ends through connecting and electrically conducting annular sleeves. The annular sleeves operate to interconnect the thin outer wires of one EL-cable to the corresponding thin outer wires of the second EL-cable. An electrically conducting jumper disposed within an insulating cap, has spaced forked protrusions, operating to mechanically engage and electrically connect the center conductors of the EL-cables when the cap nests within the base. Additional embodiments of the present invention include a connector for interconnecting a single EL-cable to a pair of insulated wires, and an electroluminescent cable connector for mounting EL-cable to a printed circuit board.

Accordingly, it is a principal object of the invention to provide a simple and easy connector for electroluminescent cable.

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It is another object of the invention to provide a connector for electroluminescent cable that splices a pair of standard insulated wires to an electroluminescent cable.

It is a further object of the invention to provide a printed circuit board mountable electroluminescent cable connector.

Still another object of the invention is to provide an electroluminescent cable connector that is water resistant.

It is an object of the invention to provide improved elements and arrangements thereof for the purposes described which is inexpensive, dependable and fully effective in accomplishing its intended purposes.

These and other objects of the present invention will become readily apparent upon further review of the following specification and drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Fig. **1** is an environmental, perspective view of an electroluminescent cable connector interconnecting two electroluminescent cables according to the present invention.

Fig. **2A** is an exploded perspective view of the electroluminescent cable connector of Fig. **1**.

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Fig. **2B** is a perspective view of the conducting sleeve element of the electroluminescent cable connector according to the present invention.

Fig. **3** is an exploded side view of the electroluminescent cable connector of Fig. 1 with the connector cap ready to be inserted into the body of the connector.

Fig. **4** is a top plan view of the connector cap of the electroluminescent cable connector of Fig. **1**, showing the top of the conducting jumper element.

Fig. **5** is a top plan view of the base of the connector of the electroluminescent cable connector of Fig. **1**, showing the inside of the cavity.

Fig. **6** is an environmental view of an electroluminescent connector according to the present invention splicing an electroluminescent cable to a pair of insulated wires.

Fig. **7A** is an exploded perspective view of the electroluminescent connector of Fig. **6**.

Fig. **7B** is a perspective view of the conducting sleeve element of the electroluminescent connector of Fig. **6**.

Fig. **8** is a top plan view of the connector cap of the electroluminescent connector of Fig. **6**, showing two jumper elements.

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Fig. **9** is a top plan view of the connector base of the electroluminescent connector of Fig. **6**, showing the inside of the base cavity.

Fig. **10A** is an exploded environmental view of a printed circuit board mountable electroluminescent cable connector according to the present invention.

Fig. **10B** is a perspective view of the conducting sleeve element with printed circuit board contact of the electroluminescent connector of Fig. **10A**.

Fig. **11** is a top plan view of the connector cap of the electroluminescent connector of Fig. **10A**.

Fig. **12** is a top plan view of the connector base and cavity of the electroluminescent connector of Fig. **10A**.

Fig. **13** is a side elevation view of the electroluminescent connector of Fig. **10A**.

Similar reference characters denote corresponding features consistently throughout the attached drawings.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

The present invention is an electroluminescent (EL) cable connector designated generally as **100** in the drawings. The connector is designed for mechanically and electrically interconnecting two EL-cables. Alternative embodiments allow

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for connecting an EL-cable to a pair of insulated copper wires or to a printed circuit board. Fig. **1** illustrates the connector **100** electrically and mechanically connecting two EL-cables **102** received by openings disposed at opposite ends **104, 108** of the connector **100**.

As best shown in the exploded perspective view of Fig. **2**, the connector **100** is comprised of a base **106** made of insulating material defining a centrally located cavity **202**. The cavity **202** has orifices **204** disposed at the opposite ends of the cavity **202**, which are sized to receive insulation stripped end portions of EL-cable **102**, the diameter of the orifice **204** being less than the diameter of the insulated jacket **112** of the EL-cable **102**.

An electrically conductive element **210**, best shown in Fig. **2B**, is encased within base **106**. The conductive element **210** has a pair of spaced apart annular sleeves **206, 208** axially aligned with orifices **204**, each annular sleeve **206, 208** sized to receive EL-wire **102**. The annular sleeves **206, 208** operate to cooperatively engage and electrical connect the thin outer wires **110** of the two opposing EL-cables **102**. The central bridging portion **212** of the conductive element **210** electrically connects the sleeves **206, 208** and is molded within base **106** beneath the floor of cavity **202**.

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As the structure and method for fastening the two EL-cables are identical, the following discussion will be limited to the structure and method for connecting one EL-cable **104** to the connector **100**. In preparing EL-cable **102** for splicing, a short length of the insulating jacket(s) **112** is removed, revealing the thin outer wires **110** spiraling the length of the phosphor coated center conductor **114**. The thin outer wires **110** are then folded back over the insulating jacket **112**, whereupon the insulation free end of the EL-wire **102** is inserted into the annular sleeve **206** (or **208**), through orifice **204**, until the insulating jacket **112** abuts the tapered wall of the orifice **204**.

When the EL-wire **102** is so received by annular sleeve **206**, the folded back wires **110** are compressed between the inner surface of the annular sleeve **206** and the outer surface of the EL-wire's insulating jacket **112**, thereby placing the thin wires **110** in electrical contact with sleeve **206**. The same procedure is repeated for connecting the second EL-cable **102** to the opposite sleeve **208**.

As shown in Fig. **3**, a cap **118**, formed of insulating material and sized fit within the base cavity **202**, contains a recess for receiving an electrically conductive jumper element **120**. The jumper element **120** has a pair of spaced apart forked protrusions **214**, which pierce the phosphor coating of the EL-

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wire **102** and electrically and mechanically engage the center conductor of both EL-wires **102** when the cap **118** nests with the base **102**. A measure of strain relief is provided by the forked protrusion **214** both wedging the center conductor **114** in the fork and piercing the phosphor coating on opposite sides of the center conductor **114**.

Fig. **4** shows a top plan view of the cap **118** with jumper element **120**, the cap **118** being made of transparent material. Fig. **5** illustrates the top plan view of the connector base **106**, the base **106** also being made of transparent material, showing the annular sleeves **206**, **208** on both sides **104**, **108** of the base **106**. A pair of grooves **502** molded within the floor of the cavity operates as a stabilizing abutment surface for the stripped portion **114** of the EL-cables **102** when the cables **102** are pierced by the forked protrusions **214** of the cap's jumper element **120**.

A second embodiment of the present invention is illustrated in Fig. **6** and discloses a connector for connecting an EL-cable **102** to a pair of insulated wires **606**, **608** of the variety well known to those in the art of electronics. This embodiment would be useful when attaching an EL-cable to a power source, the power source normally having an output consisting of a pair of insulated copper wires.

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As shown in Figs. **6** and **7A**, the EL-cable **102** is stripped and received by the annular sleeve **702** in a manner similar to that used for connecting EL-cable **102** to sleeve **206** as disclosed in reference to Figs. **1-5** of the previous embodiment. In the present embodiment, however, the pair of insulated wires **606**, **608** are received by molded passages **614** disposed at an end of the base **602** opposite the EL-wire **102**. As shown in Figs **6** and **7A**, a first and a second electrically conductive jumper element **612**, **610** are recessed in cap **604**. The first jumper element **612** has spaced apart and offset forked protrusions **706** adapted to simultaneously slice through the insulation of insulated wire **608** and grip the conductor encased in the insulation, while the forked protrusion **706** at the opposite end of jumper element **612** pierces the phosphor of EL-cable **102** and grips the center conductor **114** of the EL-cable **102** when the cap nests with the base **602**, thereby electrically connecting wire **608** with the center conductor **114** of the EL-cable **102**.

The second electrically conductive jumper **610** contained within cap **604** has a single forked protrusion **706** adapted to slice through the insulation of the second wire **606**, and grip the conductive wire **606**, continuing onward to penetrate the floor of the base **602** to make electrical contact with an offset extension **716** (seen in Fig. **7B**) of the jumper **714**, thereby

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electrically connecting wire **606** with annular sleeve **702** and the two thin wires wrapped around the phosphor of EL-cable **102**.

Fig. **8** shows the top plan views of the cap **604** having the two conducting jumpers **612** and **610**, the cap **604** being made of a transparent material. Fig. **9** is a top plan view of the base **602**, the base **602** being transparent, and illustrates groove **712** molded in the floor of the cavity **708** stabilizing the phosphor coated center conductor of the EL-cable **102**, while a pair of grooves **710** provide stable surfaces for piercing the insulation of the two insulated wires **606**, **608** when the cap **604** is firmly nested within the base **602**.

In many applications, electronic cables must terminate directly on a printed circuit board, the conductors being in electrical contact with conducting pins that are received by plated through-holes in the printed circuit board and secured in place by solder or other means. The printed circuit board mountable EL-cable connector shown in Fig. **10A** involves a third embodiment of the present invention and builds upon the basic structure of the first two embodiments. This basic structure includes: a base **1002** having a cavity **1020** and a conducting annular sleeve **1010**; and a cap **1004** sized to the cavity **1020**, having a conducting element **1006** with a forked protrusion **1008**. The printed circuit board mountable connector further comprises

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terminal pins **1012**, **1022** for placement in plated through-holes **1016**, **1018** of a printed circuit board **1014**. The transparent cap **1004** and single conducting element **1006** is shown in Fig. **11** and as previously disclosed, mates with the cavity **1020** molded in the base **1002**. As shown in Fig. **12**, orifice **1026** is molded in the base and operates to guide the phosphor coated center conductor **114** into the cavity **1020** along groove **1024**, the orifice forming a stop for the insulating jacket **112**.

As shown in Figs. **10B** and **13**, pin **1022** is formed integrally with sleeve **1010**, the sleeve **1010** being molded into the base **1002** and the pin **1022** extending normal to the sleeve **1010** and through the bottom of the base **1002** so that it can be inserted through the hole **1018** and soldered to the printed circuit board, thereby establishing electrical contact between the two thin wires **110** wrapped around the phosphor of EL-cable **102** and printed circuit board **1014**. The center conductor **114** is gripped by forked protrusion **1008**, which penetrates the floor of base **1002** to make electrical contact with the top of pin **1012**, which extends through the base **1002** so that pin **1012** can be inserted through hole **1016** and soldered to printed circuit board **1014**, thereby establishing electrical contact between the center conductor **114** of EL-cable **102** and printed circuit board **1014**.

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